

Testimony of Honorable Don Young, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Before the
Committee on House Administration
March 1, 2001

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to be before you today beginning my first session as the Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure is, as you know, the largest committee in the history of the Congress. Members of Congress want to serve on this committee because it addresses the needs of most Americans of every occupation, every race or ethnic group, and every geographic group in America. Every American cares about transportation and infrastructure in one way or another. It is vital to our economy and essential to the high standard of living and quality of life for average Americans.

The failure to properly address the transportation and infrastructure needs of our country is causing the current gridlock we see on our roads, our runways, our skies, our rail systems and our ports. Americans pay high taxes and user fees to support our transportation systems and will not tolerate this continued gridlock. Therefore, this Committee, its members, and its staff have been presented with a substantial challenge --- proper construction, maintenance, repair and operation of our transportation and infrastructure systems.

The House recently revised its rules to allow the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to once again have six subcommittees. We have retained the existing subcommittees on Aviation, Water Resources, and Coast Guard. We have replaced the Ground Transportation Subcommittee with two subcommittees, one for Highways and Transit and the other has jurisdiction over Railroads. Finally, we have reorganized the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, Hazardous Materials and Pipeline Transportation by transferring responsibility for Pipeline Safety and Hazardous Materials to the Highways and Transit Subcommittee.

We no longer have a Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, however, it is my intention that the Full Committee will conduct a great deal of oversight. I am a strong believer in active and effective Congressional oversight of federal agency activities. As Chairman of the Resources Committee, I conducted many in depth oversight hearings and I plan to continue that strong commitment for effective oversight.

I also believe that one of the most important services a committee can provide is to hold field hearings on legislation and oversight matters in affected communities. Therefore, I will be asking my subcommittee Chairmen to take their Subcommittees to those communities most impacted by matters under our jurisdiction. This will require an increase in the funds available to the Committee for travel and lodging when we conduct those hearings.

The reorganization of the Committee, along with a strong commitment to our Congressional oversight function, mandates additional staff and committee resources. Additional resources are essential to maintaining our tradition of providing high quality service to the Congress and the American people and producing well thought-out and effective legislation. Furthermore, we must maintain our ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff.

To accommodate the need for increased oversight of programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and to address emerging issues in transportation, we are requesting funds for a total of seven additional staff, five majority and two minority.

One of the most important functions of the Committee is to ensure that our multi-billion dollar programs are administered consistent with Congressional intent and that our agencies are executing programs efficiently. To facilitate and improve our oversight capability, we are requesting three investigative positions, two majority and one minority.

To increase our technical expertise in railroad issues, including management-labor relations, railroad safety, competition, high-speed rail service and Amtrak, we are requesting two counsel positions, one majority and one minority.

To enhance our ability to promptly respond to aviation issues, such as proposed mergers within the airline industry, increasing congestion, and potential management-labor contract issues, we are requesting one counsel position. To create needed additional expertise in the Committee's water resources and environment functions, we are requesting one counsel position. Both of these positions would be majority staff.

Our increased funding request for travel is a result of the planned field hearings and oversight and investigative trips for a total of 40-50 trips in both 2001 and 2002. Due to limited resources last Congress we were not able to meet the requests of Members for field hearings and inspection trips. This Congress we are committed to getting our Members and staff in the field to see the result of the work of the Committee and to see what issues lie ahead.

Because of the size of our Committee and the fact that some of our subcommittees are as large as some Full Committees, we have only one hearing room that is suitably sized for most of our hearings and markups. We are requesting funds to improve our hearing room with audio and visual enhancements. We feel it is essential to take advantage of the technology available to present information in the most efficient means to our Members.

Our request for \$7,873,320 in 2001 and \$8,686,242 in 2002, for a total of \$16,559,562 is in our best judgment what we need to carry out our legislative and oversight function for the 107th Congress.

Finally, I want to thank my good friend and colleague, Congressman James Oberstar who is the Ranking Member of the Committee. Our Committee is beginning the 107th Congress in a spirit of bipartisan cooperation to solve problems and deliver service to the American people. Congressman Oberstar and his staff has been most helpful in developing this proposed budget and I appreciate his assistance.

We expect to have a busy and productive two years ahead and ask that while you are considering our funding request, also consider the additional resources we require as we continue to serve the largest Committee in the 107th Congress.